

Victoria University of Wellington

Enhancing the student digital experience and supporting digital transformation

“Will we run it again? YES!”

Steve Warburton, associate vice chancellor (digital futures)

Rationale

At Victoria University of Wellington (VUW), New Zealand (NZ), the strongest strategic imperative was to enhance the student digital experience. A student success and retention project was being launched and to help support this project, the University needed data on the digital aspects of the student experience and wanted to draw on these insights to inform their ongoing journey of digital transformation.

The University was also keen to check perceived usability issues with their digital learning platforms, and to know what students were bringing into the learning space in terms of their own digital tools and capabilities. Other institutional instruments were not capturing this data in sufficient detail. Additionally, the capacity to benchmark against other institutions was seen as a big win.

Implementation

The survey project was led by the learning and research technology team. The team created a randomised sample of 10,000 full time students, across all years of study and across all faculties. These students were sent a link to the Jisc survey at their preferred email address. 820 students completed the survey, giving an 8.2% response rate, better than the minimum of 5% suggested in the Jisc guidance. Over 2,100 free text responses were recorded, and this data was further analysed into themes for reporting purposes.

Reflecting on the process, the team consider that getting a good response rate is critical, and needs to be planned for carefully. A busy institutional survey schedule makes it difficult to fit in anything new, particularly when targeting students. Actioning the insights from the survey requires early stakeholder buy-in, and there is a need to help different stakeholders make sense of the data and consider how best to respond. The team is already questioning how to keep the survey findings current and meaningful and are working with individual faculty teams to ensure contextual relevance. As new initiatives are already underway some issues are being addressed but with the knowledge that, during a process of digital transformation, new challenges will arise.

Key findings and impact

Overall, there was a high level of satisfaction with the provision of standardised digital services, such as wifi, printing and student desktops across the university. Asked to nominate a digital tool or app that they find useful for learning, students cited BlackBoard most often, followed by OneNote and the Google suite of tools. Most of the tools cited are free cloud tools and used across all aspects of the learning process. Consistency and effective use of digital tools was highlighted as an issue across courses. This is an improvement area of focus for the overall student digital experience.

There was a perception that not all VUW courses are preparing graduates for the digital workplace as well as they could. Free text responses highlighted how important students believe digital skills to be, as compared with other industry-focused outcomes in their course. Expectations about the use of digital tools in courses could be made clearer to students before courses start, and there was a perception that some of VUW's digital tools are under-utilised and lack collaborative features. This included a perceived under-utilisation of the virtual learning environment (VLE) as the core learning portal. There was also a desire for more online resources and for more use to be made of educational video.

These findings have been followed up with a number of focus groups to explore student perceptions of their digital environment and their digital capabilities for learning. Faculty-level data has been organised, and the relevant insights shared with the associate deans learning and teaching from each faculty. There has been a new initiative to improve the information available to students about issues such as the use of digital tools in courses, with support and self-help guides as well as digital capability training.

In line with the **digital vision for learning and teaching** and **digital roadmap project**, initiatives are in place to ensure we have the right tools to support the modern student digital experience at the University. The wider digital team are developing good practice recommendations on the use of digital tools in courses and will review courses against the guidelines for online presence.

In conclusion, the Insights process was very helpful in also allowing our central academic development unit to raise the profile of digital capability development across the institution. It proved valuable in both reflecting on and driving strategic decision making. There is a clear sense that the year-on-year data will be beneficial as a key touch point to help map progress along an institutional digital transformation journey with respect to the student digital experience.

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